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PERSONAL SKETCHES.—No. VI.

DR. WHITLEY STOKES.

THE irruption of the Gothic hordes upon the peaceful establishments of antiquity, was but an antitype of deeds which are done in our own times. The slumber of each one of our Gothic institutions—those *robusts* of the advancement of human learning—is broken in upon by the swarms which invade her preserves, and with insatiable rapacity demand what she has it not in her power immediately to give. In vain she pleads for delay, and points out the dangers of innovation and rebellion: her only chance is in “rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks:” by an effort she may save herself and live.

Which of the Universities of any standing in Europe, has escaped the effects of this revolutionary spirit? Not one. In all, changes have been, and still are brought about—whether gradually and silently, or by storm. And this must necessarily be the case. We may not put new wine into old bottles; neither may the old seats of learning be adapted to purposes of present usefulness, without undergoing a considerable share of transformation. This transformation, to be sure, is not always without its annoyances—nay, it is sometimes akin to the ludicrous. For who can think of it, without fancying to himself some worthy veteran of the good old school, wedded to the bag-wig and flapped waistcoat, the ruffles and the buckles of his earlier days of fashion—half-coated, half-bantered, or half-badgered by his youthful associates, into an abandonment of the antique, and a complete metamorphosis of the outer man? The old gentleman grumbles and fumes; but if he is wise, he secretly consoles himself with the enjoyment of a second and more secure period of adolescence.

Like all those learned foundations conceived and nurtured in the glorious darkness of scholasticism, the University of Dublin is thought to have had, not very long ago, a good deal of the rust and dust of antiquity still abiding upon her. Proud of her origin, and vain of her rich appointments, like her own Elizabeth she would fain have stood forth pranked out in her stomacher and thick brocade, and accepted the proffered homage of her humble subjects; and who would venture to disturb her slumber or oppose her will? Demur to her injunctions or deviate from her commands, and at once the spirit of the daughter of the great Harry broke forth. This haughty bearing it was that kept the world in awe, and preserved its possessor so long inviolate and intact. To drop the parallel—in the fullness of time, the Dublin University held within her bosom a few guardian spirits, who were conscious of the true state of things; who discerned the dawning of a better era in science and literature, and were anxious to throw open the windows of their

cloister, to enjoy their share of the light which began to spread abroad, and to anticipate the full effulgence which with irresistible effect was soon to penetrate and surmount every obstruction.

One of these redeeming spirits was Dr. Whitley Stokes, a physician, and for many years after the period to which I allude, a member of the board.

The pursuit of those acquirements which are necessary, in order to constitute an accomplished physician, it is well known, is eminently calculated to fill the mind with varied and extensive knowledge, tempered with benevolence and liberality: that intercourse with the world, which the practising physician must uphold, contributes effectually to remove the stubborn and awkward temper which so often mars the character of the mere scholar: while the combination of the learning of the schools with that professional knowledge which is only to be had beyond their pale, must form, as far as human acquirements can, one of the most exalted and useful ornaments of society. Such a combination was met in Dr. Stokes, a senior fellow, and a practising physician—a rare phenomenon at the board, where for many a year, the like had not been seen, and most probably will not again for an indefinite period. As at present constituted, that governing body consists of six doctors of divinity and two of common law; and of the whole number of junior fellows, it may to some appear surprising that not one belongs to the medical profession, although the statutes by no means forbid such an arrangement. The circumstance may be explained in this way. The course of study prescribed for fellowship candidates, is of an exclusive nature; it fits a man to be simply a fellow—a fellow of Dublin College, and no more! neither the divine, nor the lawyer, nor the physician are benefited by it as rendering them the better adapted for the exercise of their respective professions. To prove the verisimilitude of my assertion were unnecessary; the practical proofs are before our eyes. What though a Magee, a Crampton, or a Stokes, may be adduced as exceptions—such instances only serve to place the fact in a stronger light, and to confirm the general truth of the inference. Excepting then to men of peculiar talents, resolved upon making medicine the field of their active labours, the preparation for fellowship must prove rather a hindrance than a help. There is no natural affinity between the two callings—nor can there be, until the requisites for a seat on the bench be materially modified. Till then, too, another serious inconvenience must necessarily exist; the medical faculty has no representative at the board, and the affairs of the school of physic, so valuable an appendage to the university, and of such growing importance to the country at large, must continue, as they are, a perpetual source of confusion and annoy-

ance to the non-medical rulers of Alma Mater. But this is a subject that may be better discussed on some other occasion.

I have said that Dr. Stokes combined in himself a twofold character of rare occurrence; he was, in truth, one of the chief connecting links between the world and his college; he stood in the honorable but invidious office of daysman between the actual time and times gone by: nor should it excite surprise, that in such a situation, his course was not unimpeded with difficulties of no ordinary description. His was indeed a most chequered career. Full thirty years ago, in the troublous times of political disunion, he suffered severely for his opinions; his fellowship was well nigh wrested from him; and nearly half that period has elapsed, since from nonconformity in religion, his seat at the board was forfeited for ever.* The chain of connexion, however, which bound him to the university, was not altogether broken; a lectureship, amply endowed, was provided for him; and to this arrangement is to be traced the first introduction of natural history into the system of education in Dublin College. If it were not to consider too curiously, we might perhaps indulge in some reflections on the important consequences which occasionally are derived from very unfavorable-looking antecedents; and we might be induced to think it probable, that had not Dr. Stokes gone out, no chair of natural history had yet been founded—nay, had any other man gone out under similar circumstances, we should have remained in the same state; and further, had any other man in the university been appointed to the lectureship, it had dwindled into a sinecure, or a mere semblance of utility, like certain other misnamed appointments of the same learned establishment. With Dr. Stokes, however, as the place was probably of his own choosing, it is no sinecure. The inexhaustible variety of topics embraced in the general appellation of natural history, find him ample employment, and give wide scope for the display of his stores of information. We accordingly observe him delivering frequent courses of interesting lectures on some one or other of the great branches of natural science, mineralogy, metallurgy, mining, geology, agricultural botany, and zoology, are the principal subjects of his public prelections, and it is pleasing to add, that they are truly public; the doors of his lecture room are ever liberally thrown open to every class in society.—Dr. Stokes is essentially a benefactor of the public, and a public man.

When we enquire more particularly into his scientific opinions and peculiar tenets, we find them pre-eminently connected with mineralogy, a science which owes its origin to our celebrated countryman Richard Kirwan. Hail! (in passing) to the illustrious and forgotten dead!—illustrious abroad—forgotten at home: never was

* See Editor's note, page 195.

man more so.† But it is to mineralogy, as modified by the volcanic hypothesis, that Dr. Stokes discovers himself to be most especially devoted; it is his fortress and his rock; his grand rallying point, and the very centre of his system. Of the volcanic theory he is perhaps the ablest existing advocate; to hear him fairly out, and not to assent to the justice of his opinions, is hardly within the power of any auditor. Overwhelmed with facts and evidences drawn from his abundant armoury, no objection of his antagonists can stand for a moment before him; the whole host of Wernerians fall prostrate at his feet; we are convinced that water "could never have done this." That "water won't quench fire;" at least while Dr. Stokes is fire-king, is quite certain. The Neptunists, however, it must be admitted, are not to be denied a considerable share of credit; they had to contend under great disadvantages, and they maintained the combat with a zeal worthy of a better cause; a more unpromising hypothesis than the theoretic chimeras of the professor of Frieberg, could scarcely have been selected.

Those who are at all conversant with the history of human opinions, for such merely are all the theories with which we are acquainted, must look with indifference and distrust on even the most plausible schemes which profess to account for what man can hardly be expected ever to know. With some such feeling must we contemplate all those theories, however seemingly tenable, which go to prove that the earth, such as we find it, with its manifest traces of God's repeated visitations, has been reduced to its present state simply by the operation of one uniform physical cause. In speculations on so large a scale, there is but too much room for fallacy: and accordingly no science has given rise to so many bold theorists as explanatory geology. Consequences the most apparently incontestable, have been deduced from abundant facts, to the surprise and alarm of those who have been accustomed to the sure and rigorous, though perhaps timid march, of the Baconian methods. We permit ourselves to be led along by those fascinating guides, till we unexpectedly tread on the brink of a precipice. They would account for the flood and for the assuaging of the waters without any inconvenience—for repeated floods—for the varieties of the productions which have been found in the successive strata—for the appearance of organic remains in some of these—for the origin of some of those organized beings; and all this without going beyond the ordinary powers of mere nature. But any volcanic eruptions of which we have any traces, any earthquakes or inundations of which we have any record, are agents utterly inadequate to explain the phenomena. This throws them upon the necessity of framing some of the wildest hypotheses—the shock of comets, which may at the same time have burnt the earth, or covered it with the fiery vapours of their tails; the solar origin of our planet, which must have sprung from the great luminary in the shape of liquid glass or steam—the interior abysses of the earth, which by successively falling in, give birth to those vapourous exhalations that burst their passage forth with violence—"Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy."

† Kirwan died in 1812, and had a splendid funeral; but I have sought in vain for his grave. He was buried in the cemetery of old St. George's Church; but he has there no vestige of a tomb. Would foreigners credit this?

Alas! what degree of evidence have we, that even the most popular theory of our own times will not take its upward flight in due season, to be whirled aloft into the limbo of vanity? The volcanists, of course, say this is impossible.

But the frenzy of those philosophical speculators is decidedly on the wane—the effervescence subsides, after having foamed and frothed to an extraordinary extent; and we find just now one of the ablest of our geologists employed in curbing their licentiousness, and showing that there was not even method in their madness.‡

The opinions of Dr. Stokes, as a volcanist, might startle many of the uninitiated. He conceives the interior of our globe to be an ignited mass of metal—the prolific source of all the varieties on its surface. Every mineral substance he proves ingeniously and indisputably to be a fiery production. All the earths, commonly so called, he traces to a volcanic origin—and he shows that we are every where and always treading on slumbering or extinct volcanoes. Even in this island of ours, which we cannot historically prove to have ever been afflicted with so terrible a visitation, he points out many a crater. Basalt, limestone, granite; what rock, crystalized or amorphous, primitive, transition, or secondary, does he not trace to the productive agency of fire?—the alarming, and all-powerful second cause of the volcanic philosophers.

But it is unnecessary to dwell longer on him in this aspect—it may be more popular to delineate him as a public teacher, and the projector of numerous plans for the improvement of his country. And first, I cannot refrain from noticing that Dr. Stokes fills, in some degree, another important chasm in the system of our university: we have here no chair or provision for a lecture on political economy—a science of great and growing interest at the present day—taught in the universities of Oxford and London by distinctly endowed professors, and in the Scottish colleges, as a branch of moral philosophy. It is, indeed, an important chasm in our scheme of discipline; but neither should it be suppressed, that not only this, but the whole arrangements of our moral course are glaringly defective: the portions of moral science appointed for undergraduates in our university, being only calculated to send them forth crude logicians, and flimsily informed on the powers of the human mind.—"But, what," it may be asked, "has the professor of natural history to do with the subject of political economy? If it were to be treated collaterally with any science, it might be supposed to be more closely connected with the moral than the natural department." Why so it may be: but observe, we have no professor of moral philosophy in the university of Dublin, nor any one else willing to undertake the office; the lecturer in natural history would, therefore, seem to deserve much credit for his praiseworthy attempt to supply the deficiency. His mode of introducing the subject is as ingenious as it is simple. For instance, in opening his course of volcanic mineralogy, the very division of the objects of natural history, brings man before us as "the paragon of animals"—Nature's noblest work. Could such a being become a nuisance, a blot, a burthen to the

‡ See Dr. Ure's "New System,"—which might indeed have been better called the Philosophy of Geology—a work which will immortalize its author.

creation? A want of due cultivation of the moral principle may render him either, or both the former—the latter he may not, he cannot be. Then come in Malthus, and his doctrines; and, sooth to say, they escape not from the doctor's hands with "withers unwrung." For years back, Dr. Stokes has argued strenuously against the stony-hearted professor—now, with the multiplied counter-statements which have teemed from the press—the corrected censuses of Ireland and America—and Mr. Sadler's lucubrations to boot—it is mere amusement to take to pieces the dogmatic system of Malthus. That a system, so totally unfounded in fact—built up of unsupported assertions—and leading to consequences, not only absurd, but odious in the sight of God and man—inhuman and impious, should have, for so many years, maintained its ground, and even a certain degree of popularity, is a curious, but, at the same time, by no means a singular instance, of the success that but too frequently attends intrepid assertions, when they happen to fall in with cherished prejudices; and there surely cannot be a more unpleasant reflection to the lovers of Ireland, than to feel that *she* afforded to the theorist, the apparent illustrations of those very principles by which she subsequently suffered.

Many other topics in political philosophy are similarly discussed; and, as in his wide range he never loses sight of his native country, of the resources and capabilities of which he entertains the most encouraging sentiments, his remarks, even on the most abstruse and unpromising subjects, are essentially practical. He never fails, on any favourable occasion, to point out how Ireland may improve herself and prosper. This is evidently the theme on which he delights to dwell. The education of the people he deems highly conducive to their prosperity: information of every useful kind he would have familiarly, freely given—nay, abundantly poured upon them; but it is scarcely necessary to add, that *he* accounts the topics of *natural* science to be the most valuable in this regard. There may not be much novelty in these opinions—they, however, receive great weight from the sanction of a man like him, who has bestowed upon them the reflection of an accomplished mind, and satisfied himself of their propriety by the experience of a long life.

Dr. Stokes is frequently before the eye of the public. Though the duties of his appointment oblige him to little, the activity and benevolence of his nature permit him not to confine his labours merely to his annual courses. He has, in fact, ever and anon some important project to propose. The institution of a menagerie, or of some establishment similar to the zoological gardens of London, is known to be at present his favourite speculation. In order to explain his views, he lately delivered two very interesting lectures, to which, as usual, the public at large were invited. As the subject—"the domestication of some foreign animals and plants"—was popular, a large course of visitors did accordingly hear him.—They heard, but heeded not; it was, perhaps, too purely a tame and peaceful topic—deficient in the zest of political excitement—too harmless a project to win the patronage of a Dublin audience, or to awake any portion of our national energy. A few speeches and a dinner would have had better success—that is the true way of going to work with us; and

REVIEWS OF BOOKS.

if a public banquet had been advertised, Lord Leveson Gower, or the Lord Chief Justice Bushe (who, by the way, are patrons of the project,) to take the chair, the whole affair had infallibly prospered.

With all his learning, and talent, and patriotic zeal, Dr. Stokes is deficient in one very material qualification of a public man. As he reads his lectures from notes, however ample, we cannot help being struck with the physical disabilities under which he labours. Nature has been unkind to him in this particular. His voice is low, and soft, and weak; and to the graces of action and delivery, he has evidently never in the least stooped to sacrifice. Yet he never fails to command the respectful attention of his auditory—nay, the admiration of most to whom his manner is familiar. We see him before us a gentleman advanced in years, tall, erect, or with “a slight bend forward,” like Sterne’s monk; of a delicate frame; his general aspect benevolent and impressive. His features are of no common mould—large, and very remarkable—“sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,” but most frequently enlivened by the brilliancy of his eyes. Though not usually fluent in his delivery, his feelings on subjects in which he takes a deep interest, find vent in a natural torrent of enthusiastic expression.

What Dr. Stokes has written, he has written well; but he has not written enough. On medical subjects I believe the labours of his pen have been principally employed: his pamphlet on contagion—a subject bearing so closely on the safety and welfare of his much loved native country—was considered to be a very able performance. But the publication on which he has bestowed his most mature research, and which may perhaps be looked upon as the repository of whatever is peculiar in his opinions, on subjects not purely scientific, is his *Observations on the Population and Resources of Ireland*; a curious work, from which I had purposed to extract some passages; but, I fear I have already greatly exceeded my limits, so I shall bring my paper to a close.

I have not chosen to treat of Dr. Stokes in a strictly professional point of view, because I preferred to describe him rather as he comes before us—as he is—than as he formerly was. He was once a professor in the school of physic, and held many very important medical appointments; but he has long since resigned them all. In the decline of life, he would enjoy that repose from the labour of professional pursuits, to which the activity of his earlier career so well entitles him; whilst in his occasional *avatars*, and public lectures, he seeks the enjoyment of his benevolent principle—by contributing his valuable assistance to the diffusion of useful knowledge.

C.

* We need scarcely say that nothing can be farther from our wish or intention than to attempt any defence or extenuation of the political or religious opinions so boldly professed by Dr. Stokes. We deeply regret the dangerous errors into which we conscientiously believe him to have fallen upon both subjects, and we likewise deem it due to a distinguished and excellent prelate of our church, once provost of Trinity College, to mention, that to him Dr. Stokes was mainly indebted for the kind and liberal efforts successfully made, to prevent a violent disruption of all connection between him and the university of Dublin.

It may not be unnecessary to add, that we ourselves entertain different sentiments and a very different tone of feeling, with respect to the university, from that with which the much esteemed writer of the present sketch is apparently imbued. Though we think something, perhaps much, may yet be done to improve some of the departments of that institution, (a subject upon which we shall offer our opinions more at large some other

Cloudesley. A Tale. By the author of Caleb Williams. 3 vols. 8vo.—Colburn and Bentley—London.

To speak of the merits of the author of these volumes would be to impute utter ignorance to our readers. The name of Godwin is known throughout the literary world.

The avowed intention of the work is to illustrate a proposition, which, as the writer asserts, has been stated before, but which has not yet, perhaps, received so full an explanation as might have been given of it.

History—the history of masses of men—may be regarded under two points of view, either as it relates to the vicissitudes of nations, their rise and fall, their progress in refinement and corruption, their literature, their habits and customs, their philosophy and their religion—in a word, all that belongs to men in the aggregate; or, as it relates to the conduct of those who occupy a considerable place on the scene. Of all and each of the former, the writer asserts that we may attain to some knowledge, but of the character of individuals almost nothing.

“It is,” he proceeds, “under the latter of these heads, that, however paradoxical it may seem, fictitious history is more true and to be depended on, when it has the fortune to be executed by a masterly hand, than that which is to be drawn from state papers, documents and letters written by those who were actually engaged in the scene.”

The discussion of this paradox, for one of the most extraordinary kind it is, would, of itself, occupy a space greater than that of the three volumes we are about to review, and, after all, would, we are convinced, leave the question precisely as it was at the commencement. But, on an examination of the work before us, read with this object in view, we must say, that we do not find in it any confirmation of the principle which Godwin proposed that it should confirm.

The introduction of celebrated characters into fictitious history, is equally instructive as pleasing; not, however, because we become better acquainted with their real dispositions, but because the great points of that character can be made, “by a masterly hand,” to stand out more prominently, and thus bring both itself and all the train of actions associated with it, more forcibly before the eyes of those who hitherto knew, and were inclined to know, little about them. It is gilding the pill of history for the spoiled children of literature.

There are other points in the preface of these interesting volumes which we should like to dwell upon. This part of the book,

time, we are proud and happy to number several of its fellows among our most esteemed and respected friends, and towards one of them, at least, whose pupil it was once our happiness to be, both duty and inclination prompt us to cherish sentiments of a far warmer nature, to which we dare not trust ourselves to give utterance, lest in the effort to express our feelings in their natural strength, we might do violence to the scrupulous refinement of a mind to which we owe so much, and thus offend the native delicacy of one who does not live the less in the hearts of those who are fortunate enough to know him, that he shrinks, perhaps too sensitively, from all appearance of publicity and applause. We feel assured that we could point to at least one other member of “the Board,” who has effected, and will yet effect, for the advancement of learning and the promotion of science, both in the university and throughout all Europe, much more than even the worthy and eccentric subject of our friend’s personal sketch.

E.

indeed, seems to be considered by the author as the materiel, and the rest merely a kind of chasing, by which he hopes to bring out the value and excellence of the metal more fully; in the same manner as that author who has lately come out so voluminously before the public, but whom it is not for us to comment or criticise upon, his high mightiness the two houses of parliament, send forth a puny report of some half dozen stunted folios, illustrated with an appendix of a bulk in paper and minuteness in type, sufficient to satisfy the craving even of a German commentator. Yet after all, it is the chasing that sells the gold; it is the tale that disposes of the book; the novelist, say the best we can of it, writes for grown children, and with them “the play’s the thing,” and not the moral, whether appended to it by Æsop, or prefixed by Godwin.

The tale is worthy of the author. Two brothers, the sons of an Irish nobleman, are brought up together, but under very different treatment; the elder, the heir, is the sole favourite; the younger brother is wholly neglected, unless so far as to give him an education sufficient to carry him through the career of life for which younger brothers of noble families are usually destined. Notwithstanding this diversity in the parental management, the brothers become most strongly attached to each other through the innate good qualities of both, and, having passed through college together, they enter the same regiment. After their father’s death they join the Austrian army under Prince Eugene, in the memorable war against the Turks, in the beginning of the last century, by the toils and vicissitudes of which, their former ties of brotherly affection became more indissolubly confirmed.

Among the many romantic occurrences which take place in every war, and more particularly in one where Asiatic and European customs as well as arms must necessarily come in conflict, Lord Alton, the elder brother, rescues a beautiful young Grecian lady from the hands of some Turkish soldiers. We give the description of her person in the author’s words, because the reader can thus best judge of his merits in a department in which he is peculiarly felicitous, that of animated description.

“She stood before us in the lustre of that beauty, which is seen in the frailer and more delicate moiety of the human species, when born beneath a glowing sun: she could not be more than nineteen years of age. The first thing that struck the beholder was the extreme regularity of her features, so that the eye wandered over the whole countenance without meeting a single harshness which might disturb its enchanted gaze. Her forehead was low and broad, yet arched, and being for that reason in a considerable degree concealed by the hair, a double interest was given to the eyes, which thus became, in a certain sense, the sole interpreters of the mind. These were full and round, the dark balls dilating with innumerable rays, and fixed in a liquid heaven of the deepest, purest blue. The sweeping arch of the upper lid gave a peculiar look of nobleness and openness to the countenance. There seemed, so to speak, full room for the thoughts to come forth and display themselves. Her nose was broad at the root, and, descending straight from the forehead, terminated in due season in a rounded point. Her smile was tender and full, and, while it possessed extraordinary powers of expression, disturbed less the shape